

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4655

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 AMMAN 3408

NODIS/CHEROKEE

DEPARTMENT PASS SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR, JO, SY, EG, US, XF

SUBJ: DISCUSSION WITH RIFAI ON VISIT TO SYRIA

REF: AMMAN 3359

1. EVENING MAY 20 MET WITH PRIME MINISTER RIFAI AT HIS REQUEST TO FOLLOW UP OUR EARLIER DISCUSSION MAY 19 MON HIS VISIT TO SYRIA IN ORDER TO GIVE YOU SOMEWHAT FULLER READOUT ON WHAT OCCURRED IN HIS TALKS WITH ASAD.

2. ON GENEVA, ASAD NOTED THAT THE SOVIETS ARE NOT NOW NEARLY AS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT GENEVA AS THEY WERE. THEY NOW ARE STRESSING THE NEED FOR SOME DELAY UNTIL THE MEETINGS CAN BE CAREFULLY PREPARED AND THEY HAD NEVER DONE THIS BEFORE. ASAD SAID HE BELIEVED THAT THIS WAS A CHANGE IN SOVIET POLICY WHICH REFLECTED EVENTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. THE SOVIETS WERE APPARENTLY NOW MORE CONCERNED THAN THEY HAD BEEN ABOUT THE RESULTS FOR THEM OF A FAILURE AT GENEVA. ASAD INDICATED THAT SYRIA WOULD NOT BE PREPARED TO GO TO GENEVA UNLESS A UNIFIED VIEW OR APPROACH COULD BE WORKED OUT WITH EGYPT AS TO WHAT THEY COULD BOTH ASK FOR OR SUPPORT AT THE MEETINGS. FAILING THIS TYPE OF COORDINATION, ASAD SAID THAT EGYPT AND SYRIA WOULD JUST GET INTO A

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PUBLIC CONTROVERSY AND SYRIA EVENTUALLY WOULD THEN HAVE

TO WALK OUT. SYRIA WOULD NOT GO TO A GENEVA CONFERENCE WHICH WOULD MERELY BE USED BY EGYPT AS AN UMBRELLA FOR AN EGYPTIAN DISENGAGEMENT WITH ISRAEL AND WHICH SYRIAN ATTENDANCE WOULD BE DESIGNED TO COVER OR SUPPORT.

3. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES ASAD ARGUED THAT IT WOULD ALSO BE BETTER FOR JORDAN NOT TO GO AND THEREBY AVOID GIVING COVER TO THE EGYPTIAN POSITION. JORDAN WOULD OTHERWISE BE FORCED TO OPT FOR A POSITION FAVORING EITHER EGYPT OR SYRIA IN SUCH A SITUATION TO THE DETRIMENT OF ITS RELATIONS WITH THE ONE STATE IT COULD NOT SUPPORT. JORDAN WOULD DO BEST BY NOT GETTING INVOLVED.

4. AS FOR UNDOF AND ITS MANDATE, ASAD NOTED THAT HE HAD NOT YET MADE UP HIS MIND ONE WAY OR THE OTHER. RIFAI PRESENTED THE ARGUMENTS FOR NOT LETTING THE MANDATE LAPSE. IF SYRIA FAILED TO RENEW IT WOULD PRESENT ISRAEL WITH A PERFECT TARGET FOR PROPAGANDA ATTACKS ON THE BASIS THAT THE SYRIANS WERE THINKING OF SOME MOVE OF THEIR OWN. SYRIA HAD NOTHING TO GAIN BY BRINGING ON A WAR NOW AND THAT MIGHT BE THE RESULT IF IT FAILED TO RENEW THE MANDATE. ASAD AGREED THAT THE ARGUMENTS WERE GOOD ONES. HE NOTED THAT IF HE DOES DECIDE TO RENEW IT MAY WELL BE FOR ANOTHER SIX MONTHS AND NOT FOR TWO OR THREE MONTHS AND CERTAINLY NOT TO COINCIDE WITH THE TERMINATION DATE FOR THE EGYPTIAN (UNEF) MANDATE AT THE END OF JULY. HE WOULD NOT TIE IN THE SYRIAN MANDATE WITH THE EGYPTIAN; HE DID NOT WANT TO BECOME INVOLVED IN ANYTHING HAVING TO DO WITH EGYPT.

5. ASAD ALSO MADE CLEAR THAT HE THOUGHT THE IRAQIS WERE UP TO NO GOOD WITH SYRIA. THE IRAQI PROBLEM ON THE OTHER HAND MIGHT PROVIDE A GOOD JUSTIFICATION FOR THE RENEWAL OF THE MANDATE ON THE GOLAN IF IT WERE CLEAR THAT SYRIA WAS PREOCCUPIED ON ITS EASTERN BORDERS.

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6. ASAD NOTED THAT AT THE RIYADH MEETING HE HAD TALKED WITH SADAT FOR SIX HOURS AND THEY HAD GOTTEN NOWHERE. HE HELD VERY FRANK DISCUSSIONS WITH SADAT ON THE SYRIAN POINT OF VIEW AND ITS DIFFERENCES WITH EGYPT. HE HAD EXPLAINED CLEARLY TO SADAT THE NATURE OF ALL HIS PROBLEMS WITH EGYPT. HE MADE CLEAR THAT HE DID NOT TRUST EGYPT. IN THE END ASAD HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT SADAT AT RIYADH HAD CONCLUDED THAT

THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG IN WHAT SYRIA DID OR WAS DOING. DURING SADAT'S VISIT TO DAMASCUS LAST WEEK, THERE WAS THE SAME FAILURE TO AGREE, EXCEPT FOR THE FEW POINTS WHICH WERE CITED IN THE COMMUNIQUE. ASAD'S IMPRESSION WAS THAT SADAT'S PURPOSE WAS TO TRY TO ACHIEVE A MEASURE OF FULL BACKING FROM THE ARAB STATES FOR HIS MEETING WITH PRESIDENT FORD AT SALZBURG.

7. ASAD WAS VERY CRITICAL OF SOVIET POLICY AND BACKING FOR SYRIA. HE COMPLAINED ABOUT THE LACK OF MILITARY ARMS SUPPORT FOR SYRIA, NOTING THAT SYRIA HAD NOT GOTTEN ENOUGH FROM THE SOVIETS.

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NODIS CHEROKEE

DEPARTMENT PASS SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

8. THERE WAS ALSO REFLECTED IN ASAD'S TALK WITH RIFAI A CONCERN ABOUT THE FUTURE OF LEBANON. ASAD SAID THE QUESTION WAS NOT ONE OF THE PLO AGAINST THE LEBANESE BUT RATHER OF INTERNAL CONFLICTS AMONG THE VARIOUS LEBANESE FACTIONS. SYRIAN INDICATED HE WAS VERY WORRIED ABOUT WHAT THE EVENTUAL OUTCOME MIGHT BE WHILE AT THE SAME TIME ASAD WAS DOING HIS BEST TO STAY OUT OF IT.

9. TURNING TO IRAQ, ASAD LEFT THE IMPRESSION THAT THE CONFLICT WAS REAL. HE SAID THAT IF THE IRAQIS DID NOT COME TO THEIR SENSES HE WAS PREPARED TO CLOSE THE BORDER, STOP ALL TRANSIT TRADE, AND

SHUT DOWN THE IRAQI PIPELINES WHICH CROSS SYRIA.
IF THE IRAQIS CONTINUE AND THEN USE MILITARY
FORCE HE WILL RESPOND VIGOROUSLY AND WILL NOT
STOP UNTIL HE REACHES BAGHDAD. SYRIANS ARE QUITE
SERIOUS ABOUT THE ISSUES WITH IRAQ.

10. IN GENERAL, RIFAI FOUND ASAD IN A MODERATE AND
REASONABLE FRAME OF MIND, WELL INFORMED, REALISTIC,
ENLIGHTENED AND OPEN TO SUGGESTIONS. HE DEEPLY
WANTS TO KNOW WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN IN HIS AREA.
HE WANTS ISRAEL OUT OF THE GOLAN TERRITORY AND IS
WAITING TO SEE WHAT WILL HAPPEN THERE. HE
REMAINS SINCERELY CONCERNED THAT SADAT IS PREPARING
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TO WORK OUT A SEPARATE DEAL WITH THE PRESIDENT WHICH
WILL LEAVE SYRIA OUT OF THE PICTURE.

11. I ASKED HIM ABOUT SYRIAN VIEWS ON THE PLO.
RIFAI (IN SOME CONTRAST TO MY UNDERSTANDING IN REFTTEL)
SAID ASAD SPOKE ABOUT THE PLO IN A NEUTRAL WAY.
EVEN AFTER RIFAI ATTACKED THE PLO STRONGLY ASAD
OFFERED NO OBJECTIONS TO THEM OF HIS OWN. HE DID
STATE THAT THERE WERE MANY FACTIONS, SOME OF WHICH
WERE TRYING TO BE REASONABLE, BUT THAT THE BODY AS
A WHOLE SPOKE WITH MANY TONGUES. HE DID NOT ATTACH
A SPECIAL AMOUNT OF IMPORTANCE TO THE PLO IN HIS
DISCUSSIONS, BUT STILL MADE CLEAR THAT HE FELT HE
HAD TO CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THEM. RIFAI CONCLUDED
THAT PLO WAS REALLY NOT VERY MUCH ON HIS MIND.
PRESIDENT SADAT IN SOME CONTRAST, WHILE HE WAS IN
AMMAN, WAS MORE SOUR ABOUT THE PLO. RIFAI CONCLUDED
THAT EGYPT WOULD CONTINUE TO GIVE THE PLO THE
BARELY REQUISITE AMOUNT OF PUBLIC SUPPORT, BUT
WOULD NOT BE VERY ENERGETIC IN DOING SO. ASAD
ADDED THAT ALL THE PALESTINIANS WANT WAS THEIR
LEGITIMATE RIGHTS, A PALESTINIAN STATE AND THE RIGHT
TO A "PEACEFUL STRUGGLE." RIFAI ASKED "PEACEFUL
STRUGGLE" FOR WHAT AND ASAD ANSWERED TO UNITE WITH
THE JEWS OF COURSE*

12. ASAD DOES NOT APPEAR TO WANT A WAR WITH ISRAEL.
RIFAI DID NOT BELIEVE THAT ONE WAS IN PREPARATION.
HE NOTED THAT IN THE CASE OF THE LAST WAR THE
SYRIANS AND THE EGYPTIANS SET THE DATE A YEAR AHEAD
AND THEN PREPARED THEMSELVES VERY SLOWLY AND
METHODICALLY. THEY DID NOT GO TO WAR ON IMPULSE.
HE ADDED THAT HE THOUGHT THE "SO-CALLED COORDINATION"
WHICH EXISTS ON THE NORTHERN FRONT BETWEEN JORDAN
AND SYRIA WOULD NOT ALLOW THE SYRIANS TO GO TO

WAR WITHOUT TELLING JORDAN AND OF COURSE THEY WOULD HAVE TO INVOLVE EGYPT AS WELL. THEREFORE THERE WAS NOT GOING TO BE A WAR STARTED FROM THE ARAB SIDE IMMEDIATELY. BUT RIFAI DID NOT KNOW WHAT THE ISRAELIS WERE UP TO.

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13. RIFAI SAID HE DOUBTED THAT THERE WOULD BE A WAR BETWEEN SYRIA AND IRAQ, ALTHOUGH THERE MAY BE SOME CLASHES, HOWEVER, SADAT CANNOT PATCH UP THE QUARREL. THERE ARE BASIC POLITICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO WINGS OF THE BAATH AND RIFAI DID NOT BELIEVE THAT IRAQ WOULD AGREE TO STOP INTERFERING IN THE AFFAIRS OF THE SYRIAN PARTY. I NOTED THAT THERE SEEMED TO BE TROOP MOVEMENTS IN PROGRESS IN SYRIA, AND RIFAI SAID THAT HIS INTELLIGENCE PEOPLE HAD NOTED TWO SYRIAN DIVISIONS HAD MOVED TO THE EASTERN BORDER WITH IRAQ.

14. RIFAI SAID THAT WHILE SADAT HAD PRESSED JORDAN TO GO TO GENEVA AND TO SPEAK FOR THE WEST BANK, THE JORDANIANS HAD NOT GIVEN HIM THE SATISFACTION OF AGREEING. THE JORDANIANS REMEMBER BEING SET UP FOR RABAT WITH THE ALEXANDRIA COMMUNIQUE LAST YEAR BY SADAT AND WILL NOT PLAY THAT GAME AGAIN. RIFAI SAID THAT SADAT EVEN REPEATED THAT HE WAS STILL BOUND BY THE ALEXANDRIA COMMUNIQUE, AND WANTED TO WORK TOGETHER WITH JORDAN ON THAT BASIS.

15. RECOMMEND DEPARTMENT REPEAT TO CAIRO AND DAMASCUS. PICKERING

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